

THE WORLD OF
INTERIORS

HOUSES

GUEST STARS

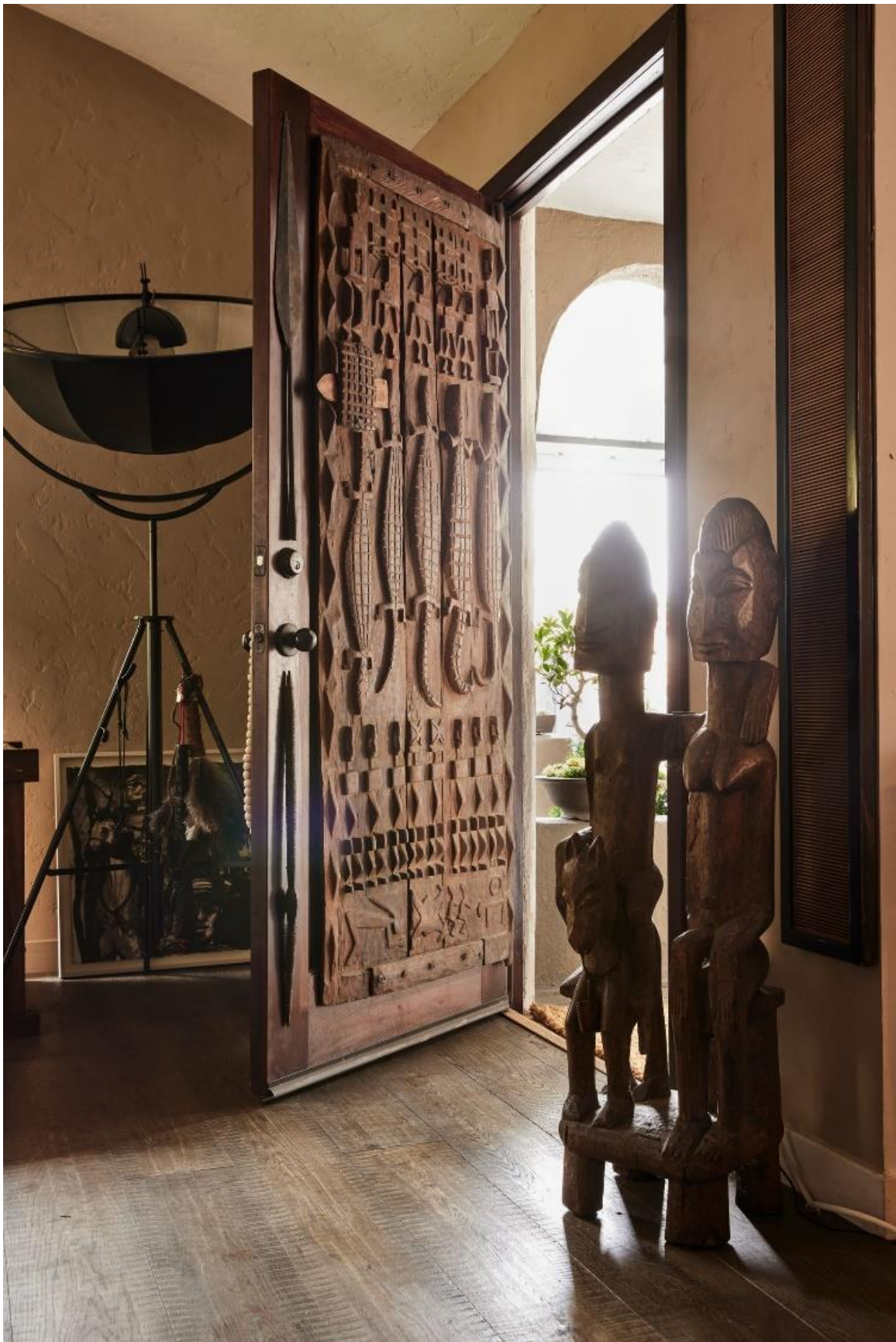
Chaz Guest's own canvases are naturally front and centre in his LA home/studio, but that's not to say myriad other influences – with aesthetic cues taken from Japan, the Gambia, Mexico and many more – don't play important supporting roles

By Ivan Shaw , Photography by Sam Frost

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Chaz Guest's walnut dining room table, custom made by Josef at A.D. Ahlers. Along the left wall, a portrait of Quincy Jones by Elaine de Kooning and farther down, a portrait by Francesco Clemente. Sitings editor: Lisa Rowe



A door and statue made by the Dogon community in Mali, acquired by Guest in the Gambia 20 years ago

It's hard to believe now, but acclaimed artist Chaz Guest began his career sleeping on a New York City rooftop, and the person to blame for that predicament was the uber-glamorous couture designer Christian Lacroix. Guest, speaking to me from Paris (where he is working on an upcoming exhibition), laughingly tells the story of how, while working in the French capital in the late 1980s as a fashion illustrator, he was suffering from a deep sense of frustration due to the merciless cropping of his work by a reckless art director. Assigned by *Joyce Paris* magazine to do an illustration for a new look by Lacroix, Guest found himself face-to-face with the designer in his studio. Seeing something in his work that not even Guest had seen in himself, Lacroix told him: 'You are a painter.'

Guest heeded the designer's edict and headed back to New York to teach himself how to paint. With little money to support his new career, no Plan B and no place to live, the budding artist had no choice but to spend his nights on the aforementioned rooftop. Today, his finances being much improved, Guest happily lives a continent away from his former bed under the stars.

To say that Guest's home of the past two and a half years is an amalgamation of influences is an understatement. Located in the Mid-City area of Los Angeles, which is roughly the neighbourhood around Wilshire Boulevard, near the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the 1930s Spanish-style house and studio where Guest lives and works brings together influences from as far away as Asia, Europe and Africa.

Originally, it was a staggering tax bill that propelled Guest to purchase the home. After a run of very good years selling his work, including a hit show at Vito Schnabel gallery, Guest couldn't accept continuing to hand over a large chunk of his income to the Internal Revenue Service. 'I promised myself that I would never, ever do that again in my life if I could help it.' With the vow made, he went about finding the perfect place to call home.



On the wall: *The Vision* and *American Boy*, both painted by Guest. Below, the artist's McIntosh turntable and amplifier. Listening to jazz, or as he likes to call it 'American classical', is key to Guest's creative process



Guest always dreamed of having a freestanding tub, so devoted a room to it. On the walls from left are a curtain from the Buaisou indigo farm in Tokushima, Japan, and a photograph by Los Angeles artist Brian Bowen Smith

Relying on ‘two fantastic’ estate agents, Guest found the house he was looking for, which at the time was ‘disastrous, which is why they had to tear it down to the sticks and even pull up the entire floors to do all of the piping and electrical work’. Regardless of its state of disrepair, Guest knew that he had found his home. Having collected objects relentlessly ‘through Paris, West Africa, the Gambia, Mexico City, New York and Japan, he realised that ‘you know exactly what you like and how you want to live, what you want to eat, what you want to wear. And it seems as though I walked into this one empty canvas and said: “I need to be comfortable. Put this there, lift that up, tear that down.”’



A view through sliding doors into Guest's studio, which he named 'The Theodore' after his father

Listening to jazz – or, as Guest likes to refer to it, ‘American classical music’ – is critical to his artistic practice, in that he feels a soul connection to the likes of John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis when he is working. ‘It’s almost like I’m not even painting, I’m just having this emotion and sound come through my hands and translating it into lines and colours,’ he says.



Guest's bedroom, which includes sheets custom designed by Olatz with his initials sewn into the embroidery



Guest's kitchen, including a 1967 photograph by John Simmons and, on the stove, a clay rice maker from a small village in Japan



Also in Guest's kitchen is a painting by Yuuka Asakura, whom the artist met through Yohji Yamamoto

The layout of Guest's property is familial in nature. The house, called 'The Algirtha', is named after his mother, and the studio building where he paints is 'The Theodore', named after his father, who was a preacher. Throughout the house and studio, works from fellow artists and friends, including Henry Taylor, Julian Schnabel, Antonio López, Robert Graham and Richard Mayhew, hold court in each of the rooms, along with photographs of his sons, Zuhri and Xian.



Guest's palette resting between works in the artist's Los Angeles studio

Although the house is filled with the treasures that Guest has collected from across the globe, there is one predominant theme that extends throughout the space. He is deeply connected to all things Japanese. It started when he was around 11 years old. Watching an injured Japanese gymnast maintain composure while dismounting the rings with a broken knee, Guest was mesmerised. His older brother explained that this is what is known as *bushido*, which refers to ‘the way of the warrior’, a code of ethics practised by samurai that emphasises honour, loyalty and self-control.



A selection of recent drawings by the artist spread out on a table



The artist at work in his Mid-City Los Angeles studio

From this experience, Guest became transfixed with Japan (even taking up martial arts) and more recently considered moving there, but then realised he could bring the Japanese aesthetic into his home, oftentimes unconsciously. ‘I started with, wow, this is nice wood. Where’s that from? Japan... This is a nice paper, where is it from? Japan. This is nice food. What’s this called? Sushi. On and on and on,’ he says.

Asked if he ever thinks about leaving Los Angeles, Guest notes that he will most likely continue to travel but: ‘I want to just maybe stay in place and create paintings that I can leave behind that hopefully, will make a difference for humanity in some tiny, tiny way.’